

WOMEN, LEADERSHIP

AND

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

by DR. SHAWN ANDREWS

Women leaders are still a minority in the business world. During the past three decades, women have achieved parity with men in both number of employees in the workforce and positions in middle management—women now represent 58.6 percent of the labor force in the United States and occupy 51.4 percent of all management, professional and related occupations according to the U.S. Department of Labor. However, women hold only 14.3 percent of executive officer positions of the Fortune 500 companies, and the number of female CEOs at these companies is 3.8 percent (and this number has barely budged in 10 years).

To further complicate these statistics, research in the past decade identifies an individual's emotional intelligence (EQ) as a key aspect and driver of leadership effectiveness. Emotional intelligence assessments have found women and men to be equally as intelligent emotionally, but they are strong in different areas or attributes that are considered gender-specific. The significance of these statistics and the implications on leadership is cause for discussion.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence research has shown that certain EQ attributes are either male-specific, female-specific or gender-neutral. Although there is overlap, in general, men and women tend to be strong in different EQ areas or attributes. For example, women score higher than men do in areas of empathy and social responsibility, which are generally considered female-specific emotional intelligence attributes. In contrast, men outperform women on stress tolerance and self-confidence measures, which are generally considered male-specific emotional intelligence attributes.

Other types of EQ attributes include emotional self-awareness, emotional expression, independence, flexibility, problem solving, impulse control, interpersonal relationships and optimism. Some of these attributes are considered gender-neutral; however, the gender-specific attributes may play a significant role in how we perceive men and women as leaders in the workplace.

As a training and development professional, you can help by providing emotional intelligence assessments, education and training to your audience and your leadership teams so they have awareness and understanding of their specific emotional intelligence attributes.

RESEARCH STUDY: METHODS AND RESULTS

To better understand and describe the impact that gender-specific EQ attributes play in the career advancement of women to leadership positions, I conducted a research study as part of my doctoral dissertation. Women at four levels of a pharmaceutical company were studied – vice presidents, directors, managers and administrative assistants. Each participant was given an EQ assessment followed by in-depth interviews. The leadership level, time in position, formal education, last promotion and total EQ scores varied greatly.

In regards to specific EQ attributes, the most frequent response cited by all participants as having the most impact on their career advancement was assertiveness, self-regard, problem-solving, stress tolerance and interpersonal relationships. Emotional expression in the workplace was noted by many as having a negative impact on career advancement.

Differences did emerge among the leader's EQ scores and attributes. The average total EQ scores

for vice presidents was 120, directors was 116, but managers had the highest average EQ scores of 123. In addition, the VPs were higher in decision making and self-expression composites than other groups, which are generally considered male-specific attributes. In contrast, the manager group had markedly higher interpersonal relationship scores, which are considered female-specific attributes. No major EQ differences emerged between the director and administrative assistants group.

This data suggests that in order to be perceived as leaders, women adapt and exhibit more male-specific EQ attributes as they rise to ranks of leadership. Middle managers, on the other hand, have to get work done through others to be most effective. This group was highest in overall EQ and leveraged more female-specific attributes. Interestingly, all participants commented that EQ contributes to the leadership gap because of interpersonal relationships, citing that men network more with other men and it's still difficult to break into the "old boy's network."

BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP

Emotional intelligence and leadership are closely related concepts. The study findings confirm this, but illustrate reasons for the leadership gap between men and women are multi-factorial, and go much deeper than EQ or leadership alone. Clear themes emerged that significantly impact a woman's career advancement. This is supported by data from McKinsey that showed there are four primary barriers that make the problem of few women in leadership difficult to address.

- **Structural Barriers:** lack of access to informal networks (old boy's network), lack of female role models and lack of female mentors.
- **Institutional Mindsets:** role congruity theory, gender bias, gender stereotyping, and agentic leader behaviors (where people are producers, as well as products of social systems).
- **Individual Mindsets:** a large percentage of women hold themselves back.
- **Lifestyle Choices:** work-life balance, family choices, breadwinner/caregiver priorities and women self-selecting out of leadership roles.

These barriers have existed and persisted for decades, and the beliefs and perceptions are held by both men and women. Role congruity theory is defined as the prejudice that exists when one person holds beliefs or stereotypes about a group that are inconsistent with the behavior thought to be necessary to succeed in a specific role.

For example, women were less effective than men in military positions, but were somewhat more effective in education, government and social service organizations, and substantially more

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IS
A KEY ASPECT AND DRIVER OF
LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS.



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Jazmine Boatman with @BizBreakRadio: Orgs with a higher percentage of #women in senior #leadership had better bottom-line value.

effective in middle management positions, where interpersonal skills are highly valued. This makes it difficult for men or women to succeed as leaders if their behavior is not perceived to be congruent with their gender.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN

In 2012, McKinsey interviewed 200 female executives across various industries in positions of director, vice president and senior vice president. They found that these women were successful, adapted to male environments and overcame extraordinary challenges. However, a surprising 59 percent did not aspire to the C-suite (CEO, CFO and COO) citing not wanting the politics at the top and work-life balance as the two primary issues. This could be a possible reason why there are only 3.8 percent of female CEOs at Fortune 500 companies.

Young women need female mentors. Too often executive women are overly encumbered with daily duties and tasks, which cause them to avoid responsibilities of mentoring. With a critical mass of baby boomers approaching their late 60s and continuing to work, women need to make developing and helping other women a priority. Also, organizations should consider EQ development as an initiative for female executives and potential leaders.

Another implication that must be considered is women often want different things than men, and are confronted with barriers that men do not have to face. As a result, many women have opted for the private sector, nonprofits or start-up companies where there are a significant number of women owners, women leaders and women that make up the workforce. Thus, some of the barriers women face in large public companies is minimized. These include

less gender bias and stereotyping, more female mentors, more female role models and leadership support to help women advance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Based on the literature and findings in this study, the researcher recommends five practices that are consistently tied to success at hiring, retaining and promoting women.

- **Hands-on Leadership Starting at Top:** The CEO and senior leaders need to be personally invested and model the desired mindsets and behaviors to build an open and accepting culture.
- **Diversity Leadership with Teeth:** Appoint well-respected managers to shine the spotlight on diversity issues, guide the organization and drive continual vigilance.
- **Pervasive Mentoring Programs:** CEO and diversity leaders should be personally accountable for programs. Mentors create opportunities and provide active support and advocacy for high-potential women.
- **Robust Talent Management Program:** Adapt existing recruiting and promotion processes to call out performance with regard to gender diversity.
- **Provide Emotional Intelligence Education:** EQ assessment, training, coaching and development programs across a broad population of employees.


SO, WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The leadership gap is a global phenomenon whereby women are disproportionately concentrated in lower-level and lower-authority leadership positions than men. Although the barriers discussed earlier are generally conceived to be against women, the

labyrinth can be generalized to encompass other nondominant groups such as ethnic and racial minorities. Only after these barriers are removed, will women advance in large numbers to senior leadership positions.

Decisions on whether to promote a man or woman should be based on performance. It is important to note that there are gender-neutral leader attributes, such as flexible, optimistic, intelligent, strategic, sincere and results-oriented, which could benefit any organization. Regarding gender-specific EQ attributes, not all men or women exhibit attributes that are specific to their gender and some individuals can be strong, confident and comfortable exhibiting opposite gender attributes in the workplace.

As a training leader, you can influence both emotional intelligence and leadership at your organization. You can create awareness of emotional intelligence to help close any gender gaps or misperceptions that may exist. You can initiate training programs that help employees improve specific EQ attributes. Further, you can collaborate with human resources to create training programs that develop leadership talent.

Corporate leaders should be a mosaic that represents their employees and their customer base – and stakeholders of a corporation expect that the company will appropriately manage and maximize their resources, including human capital. If companies tap their female employees, it would have a positive impact on diversity both in middle management and the board of directors. 

Shawn Andrews, Ed.D., M.B.A., is a senior manager of global compliance and training at Allergan. Email Shawn.

TAKEAWAYS

- Women now account for more than 50 percent of college graduates, professional degrees and management related occupations. However, women only hold 14.3 percent of executive officer positions of the Fortune 500 companies, and the number of female CEOs at these companies is 3.8 percent.
- Emotional intelligence (EQ) assessments have found men and women to be equally as intelligent emotionally, but they are strong in different areas or attributes.
- Research reveals women in leadership positions are higher in male-specific EQ attributes, and women in middle manager positions are higher in female-specific EQ attributes.
- There are four primary barriers that keep women from advancing into leadership roles.
- Five recommendations for organizations consistently tied to success at hiring, retaining, and promoting women.
- Trainers can influence both emotional intelligence and leadership at organizations.
- Corporations need to leverage their talent and develop leaders who represent both their employees and customers.